

The 'Only Child' at Home: Exploring Lived Experiences of Senior High School Learners in The Philippines

Leonielyn G. Malicay

College of Teacher Education, Surigao del Norte State University-Malimono Campus, Philippines

Abstract: *The economic circumstances, overcrowding, the energy crisis and the need for two breadwinners per family have all contributed to this need for family planning. Parents opt to choose to have one child as one of the most radical approaches to overcoming crises and limiting the growth of the population, while others are due to their financial problems or because they don't have enough time to raise more children. However, the child must have siblings to have a companion and fortune in life. Only children are perceived as spoiled, selfish because they're accustomed to getting whatever they want from their parents, including undivided attention, but not all single children are the same. Many children are also not given what they want because of the problems they face in life, especially now with a pandemic. In this research, we will examine the challenges and opportunities of an only child. As a part of a trend towards a smaller family size in general, the proportion of one-child families has increased over the last decade in Asia, particularly in China.*

Keywords: High School Learners.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, family planning is a method that is commonly used in our society. The economic circumstances, overcrowding, the energy crisis and the need for two breadwinners per family have all contributed to this need for family planning. Parents opt to choose to have one child as one of the most radical approaches to overcoming crises and limiting the growth of the population, while others are due to their financial problems or because they don't have enough time to raise more children. However, the child must have siblings to have a companion and fortune in life. Only children are perceived as spoiled, selfish because they're accustomed to getting whatever they want from their parents, including undivided attention, but not all single children are the same. Many children are also not given what they want because of the problems they face in life, especially now with a pandemic. In this research, we will examine the challenges and opportunities of an only child. As a part of a trend towards a smaller family size in general, the proportion of one-child families has increased over the last decade in Asia, particularly in China.

Some studies have investigated the impact of only-child status on mental health. When investigating the mental status of adolescents, some important factors that have been proved to be related to depression and anxiety, such as poor parent-child relationship or abuse, should be considered and measured. While resilience can cope with difficulties and alleviate depression and anxiety caused by adverse experiences of an only child. Therefore, the effects of adverse experience, parent-child relationship, and resilience should be measured in the survey of the mental health status of adolescents (Cao et al. 2021).

According to (Lin et al. 2021) they mentioned that China today has the highest number of only children in the world due to policies that strongly encourage young families to have only one child. This policy has become known as the One Child Policy (OCP).

Chinese only children actually suffer more loneliness than their peers with siblings. Three studies were conducted to examine belief in the only-child-as-lonely stereotype and determine whether only children report greater loneliness than children without siblings. Overall, then it seems most likely that Chinese only children themselves will report lower feelings of loneliness than their peers with siblings do. We make this prediction based on the evidence that Chinese

only children may have closer and more frequent contact with their parents, as well as more frequent contact with their grandparents (Lin et al. 2021).

Growing up as an only child is a process that has unique developmental characteristics. Showing all attention to the only child during childhood and adolescence comes to the fore. Besides, it is also possible for the family to direct all its economic, social and emotional resources to the only child. The only children may experience conflict in their social relationships due to excesses or imbalances in the parents' attitudes towards their only child. However, there are some thoughts that the only children have difficulty in interpersonal adaptation, show weakness in social skills, and are isolated from social environments by their peers (Kocatürk 2021).

Several studies revealed a significant association between childhood maltreatment (e.g., emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect) and depressive symptoms. According to the attachment theory, exposure to maltreatment in childhood promotes the formation and maintenance of negative schemes about oneself, others, and the world, making it difficult to build secure early attachment relationships (Song et al. 2022)

Researchers further hypothesized that the differentiation of family environment between only children and children with sibling(s) might be the cause of their variations in social competence. As suggested by social learning models researchers found that children with siblings benefit from interactions with their siblings and develop better social competence compared the peer-related social competence among only children and first-borns with one sibling, and second-born with one sibling who were at primary school age and found that the only children were more victimized and aggressive than others, thereby implying that non-only children may have better skills to manage conflict (Xie et al. 2021)

This study aimed to exploring the lived experiences among Senior High School Students determined as the only son and the only daughter at their respective homes. It further investigated the advantages and disadvantages being such.

Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

- How do only children perceive and navigate their interpersonal relationships, both within the family and in wider social contexts?
- What are the cognitive and educational opportunities available to only children, and how do these factors influence their academic achievements?
- How do only children perceive and cope with the pressure of parental expectations and the absence of siblings as sources of support?
- How do the experiences of only children differ across different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds?

This study focuses on the challenges and opportunities of an only child by junior and senior highschool students in Surigao del Norte State University –Malimono Campus. This study will not cover other students that are not an only child. The other students which do not fall as part of senior high school students are not within the scope of this research. This research also excluded the parents, relatives, and friends of the participants.

1.1 Significance of the study.

This research would be beneficial to the students because they will know the negative effects and life of being an only child. Therefore, this also be beneficial to teachers and parents, friends, and relatives because they will be able to understand the changes of the behavior and perception in life of the students and the effects of stress and problems to their children. This would be beneficial to the future researcher because they can get some information that might needed in their research and encourage other researchers and young people who are still doing research to do this kind of research because there are only few researchers have been studying this kind of problem.

1.2 Method

This study employed on a qualitative phenomenological viewpoint and used the semi-structured interview method to survey 5 participants individually in an effort to understand the difficulties and challenges of being an only child. The Surigao Del Norte State University Del Carmen Campus gave its approval for this research implementation, informed consent was signed in writing from each interviewee for this study.

The method used in this study, including the description of the respondents, data gathering procedures used method for analysis and the statistical treatment of the raw data gathered in this study. Thus, data were gathered among pupils of 1 secondary school in Malimono, Surigao del Norte. Classes within the school were chosen at random, from which 5 students completed a questionnaire. Their ages were between 15 years above.

In-depth interviews with a selected sample of only children were conducted to gain qualitative insights into their experiences, feelings, and perspectives. This will provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities they encounter.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that the Challenges and Opportunities of the Only Child was primarily embodied in various relationships and experience, including those within the following seven themes:

Thematic Analysis were as follows:

Theme 1: The Loneliness of Being an Only Child

P2: Being the only kid in the family means that your parents are able to give you their whole attention. Since it's actually just for you, they won't have an issue getting anything for your other siblings.

P3: I am feeling sad and lonely, because you're the only one left at home and have nobody to talk to.

Observation

Only child can often lead to feelings of loneliness. Without siblings to interact with on a daily basis, only children may experience a lack of companionship and someone to share their experiences with. They may feel isolated and yearn for the presence of siblings who can understand and relate to their upbringing. The absence of siblings can also result in a heavier reliance on parents for social interaction, which can further contribute to a sense of loneliness.

Since there are no siblings in the home, it is considered that only children experience loneliness or a sense of exclusion. Although it is possible, only children receive their parents undivided attention. They may therefore be influenced by this situation by their demand for adult company. Only child and their adolescent's ability to understand the meaning of loneliness has been investigated in few studies. Researchers have repeatedly discovered that although youngsters who are the only children spend more time alone, they are not less well-liked than those who have siblings. However, they are less "affiliative" than middle or younger kids. The likelihood that only children will engage in certain social activities, such as team sports, is lower, and many seem to favor solitary hobbies like reading, writing, or stamp collecting.

Theme 2: Only Child's Status

P1: I'm not having a hard time getting the attention of my parent since I'm the only child. However, they don't spoil me, therefore, they set limitations.

P2: When it comes to academic achievements, since I'm the only child I have all their trust and expectations for what I could be in the future.

P3: When there is a problem, I never know who should I put up first because I love them both.

P4: It's very strict, because you need to ask permission before you can go out with friends or belong to a circle.

P5: It's better to be an only child, its not a sort of trouble like financial needs.

In many societies, the status of being an only child carries certain connotations and expectations. Only children are often seen as receiving undivided attention and resources from their parents, which can create both positive and negative perceptions. Some people view only children as privileged, assuming they receive excessive pampering and material possessions. On the other hand, there may also be stereotypes associated with being an only child, such as being spoiled or selfish.

Being the only child in the family is a big responsibility especially when you are the only child. In terms of problems, we can lean on to these people because they are capable to manage situations. There are some aspects that symbolize the life of being the only child like being known as independent, trust worthy, brave enough to overcome obstacles,

talkative, introvert, spoiled, and etc. However, there are many studies recognize the behavior of the only child that finds them more interesting than the others.

Theme 3: Ways of Only Child: Expressing Their feelings and Problems

P1: Expressing my emotions to my parents is a challenging task for me. While I may share minor issues with them, I prefer to keep major problems to myself.

P2: Although I am not very forthcoming with my parents, I tend to share my feelings with them when I am facing an issue. Additionally, I have a group of friends who are supportive and willing to listen when I need to talk about my problems.

Only children may face unique challenges in expressing their feelings and problems. Without siblings to confide in, they may rely on other avenues to express themselves, such as close friends, extended family members, or even journaling. Some only children may find it difficult to openly discuss their emotions due to a lack of shared experiences with siblings. It is crucial for parents and caregivers to provide a supportive environment where only children feel comfortable expressing their feelings and seeking help when needed.

Only children expressing their problems can vary depending on the individual and their unique personality and upbringing. However, some general observations can be made: Self expressions, Independence, Emotional maturity, Peer interaction, and more. It's important to note that these observations are generalizations, and individuals may deviate from these patterns. Each child is unique, and their personality, upbringing, and individual circumstances will shape how they express and handle their problems.

Theme 4: The certain impact of wrong speculations academic pressured of being an only child

P2: It's a big Impact for me because I have no one to be close to in the future, unless I can get a boyfriend and it's stressful for me.

P3: It's hard, and you're under pressure because what you think is that you should study well so that you become a professional in the future because you're the only one, and they'll only rely on you.

P4: It's has a big impact to people because, they have a lot of speculations about you, even if it's not true.

According to our research, only children frequently excel academically and make excellent leaders. Many single children are born with the drive to succeed and the capacity for leadership. Additionally, as an only child, they frequently have more opportunities to do so. However, despite all their willpower, individuals still feel pressured by their academic performance and future requirements. One of the issues facing single children is their future because they will be their parents' only source of support and have no one else to lean on except themselves.

There can be a certain impact on only children due to wrong speculations and academic pressure. Society may hold certain assumptions about only children, such as having higher intelligence or academic achievements. These expectations can create a burden on only children, leading to increased academic pressure and a fear of underperforming. Moreover, wrong speculations and stereotypes can also cause anxiety and self-doubt among only children, who may feel the need to constantly prove themselves to meet societal expectations

Theme 5: Seeking for Siblings

P2: Yes, since you are the only one when it comes to other problems. issues, you can express your feelings and views on your own. My parents and I can talk about other issues, but we can't talk about everything. Unless you have siblings, you both agree on issues and concerns.

P3: Having siblings makes sense because fighting among siblings is normal. However, having siblings also benefits me because they assist with household issues and tasks. In addition, they will assist when our parents get older, taking over for us in caring for them and purchasing their medications, among other things.

P4: Yes, when I was little, I really wanted siblings. I have a stepsister, but it's even better if it comes from your parents. As long as my family is together, I don't mind how chaotic we are.

Some only children may express a desire for siblings as they grow older. They may feel a sense of longing for the sibling relationships they observe in others and the companionship they believe siblings provide. This longing can stem from a desire for shared experiences, support, and the feeling of belonging to a larger family unit. Some only children may actively seek out relationships with peers or form close friendships that fulfill the role of siblings in their lives.

Children who have grown up with siblings naturally and with great understanding. Since they typically spend more time together than they do with their parents, their bond is likely to be long-lasting. Children who grow up with their siblings tend to feel more secure as adults since they can mold up against each other's traits. Early on, they learn the importance of ties to others, love, and family. It seems sense that they each have a unique personality. Unsurprisingly, only kids say they have a better relationship with their parents. But for some only children, having a sibling gives them the companionship they need in life. Particularly in the previous year when the pandemic started and lockdown was implemented in the Philippines, many single children have realized that having siblings are what they need.

Theme 6: Benefits of an Only Child in the Family

P2: Your parents will spoil you about the things you want and they exclusively focus on you. Therefore, I am also the first grandchild on both mother's and father's sides. Consequently, having no enemies makes being quite beneficial for your peace of mind.

P3: I mentioned before that you need to get used to being independent, which is what this is. Yes, you may get used to not depending on anyone for household tasks, particularly for men's tasks. Those are the tasks I didn't anticipate having to complete on my own.

P4: The advantage is that you can request money at any time. I occasionally hard money, and if I need something, they fulfill my demands.

Being an only child can bring certain advantages within a family dynamic. With no siblings to compete with, only children may receive more attention, resources, and opportunities from their parents. These advantages can contribute to the development of a strong sense of self and individuality.

Being the only child has a lot of benefits, including the fact that your parents focus solely on you. In their life, you have a special place. Parental care is unending. For instance, if you need a new toy or some clothing, they just go to the store and get it for you. Aside from that, you have complete privacy. The space, the computer, and any other items are not required to be shared. As an added bonus, you receive more gifts or cash. There is no one to argue with, too, on top of everything else. No one can take your possessions and cause damage to them since you are alone. Nothing bothers you. However, those without siblings can benefit from being the center of attention during their childhood, which may help with establishing self-esteem, self-reliability, and resilience. There isn't any competition, strife, or sibling rivalry to deal with, though such things can all be character-building.

Theme 7: Considering themselves as Matured

P1: for me, I don't know if I'm matured enough

P2: right now at my age I build myself as independent.

P3: you become mature to the point that you are not counting on towards others. Although, there are times that I considered myself as immature just because of being spoiled.

P4: I grow up without my parent and I live with my own. Only myself I am leaning to.

P5: instead of playing outside, I started to think maturely and take the chores at a very young age.

Only children may often perceive themselves as more mature compared to their peers with siblings. Growing up with mainly adult interactions, they may adopt adult-like behavior and attitudes earlier in life. They may feel a sense of responsibility and independence from an early age, as they are often relied upon by their parents for companionship and support. However, it is important to note that maturity levels can vary among individuals, and not all only children will necessarily consider themselves as more mature than their peers. They bear so many complications in mind and body. However, they are capable of managing situations. They're expected to develop into egotistical people who solely consider their own interests and requirements. Additionally, it is thought that loneliness and antisocial tendencies are

caused by sibling contact deficits. Some people even believe that these effects primarily affect youngsters, with adults only exhibiting hypersensitivity to criticism as they become older and having weak social skills.

III. CONCLUSION

Only children often face unique challenges in society, such as feeling less important or valued. Their behavior, learning needs, wants and characteristics differ as they lack attention and companionship at home. However, it is important to recognize that being an only child does not define an individual's worth or potential. Society should work to eliminate the stigma and stereotypes surrounding only children and recognize their valuable contributions. This research seeks to inform parents, educators, and policymakers about the specific needs and support systems that can facilitate healthy development and well-being for only children.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Lin, Shengjie, et al. "Editorial: Chinese Only Children: Advantaged or Disadvantaged?" *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media SA, Aug. 2021. Crossref, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.742186.
- [2]. Lin, Shengjie, et al. "Chinese Only Children and Loneliness: Stereotypes and Realities." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, no. 4, American Psychological Association (APA), 2021, pp. 531–44. Crossref, doi:10.1037/ort0000554.
- [3]. Liu, Yixiao, and Quanbao Jiang. "Who Benefits From Being an Only Child? A Study of Parent–Child Relationship Among Chinese Junior High School Students." *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media SA, Jan. 2021. Crossref, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.608995.
- [4]. Song, Lingling, et al. "Mediating Effects of Parent-Child Relationship on the Association between Childhood Maltreatment and Depressive Symptoms among Adolescents." *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Elsevier BV, Sept. 2022, p. 105408. Crossref, doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105408.
- [5]. Cao, Yujia, et al. "The Role of Only-Child Status in the Psychological Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Chinese Adolescents." *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Elsevier BV, Mar. 2021, pp. 316–21. Crossref, doi:10.1016/j.jad.2020.12.113.
- [6]. Sha Xie, et al. "Family Environment Profile in China and Its Relation to Family Structure and Young Children's Social Competence, Early Education and Development". doi:10.1080/10409289.2021.1904732b